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## Interview

(From a radio interview by Andrea Young in July, 2000)

Andrea (A): Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? Do you consider yourself in the spiritual tradition of [Advaita](#) Vedanta?

Nirmala (N): I don't label myself as anything. It's simpler that way; it's truer. There are no certifying boards for [spiritual teachers](#), so I don't claim to be anything.

(A): Is it that you consider yourself a [spiritual teacher](#)?

(N): I finally figured that I had to call myself something, so I settled on "spiritual teacher," as the least distorting description. It's simpler than saying, "Ahhh" and not having an answer whenever someone asks what you do.

(A): For those listeners out there who know this interview has something to do with spirituality, what would you tell them is most important?

(N): It's actually a very simple message: The peace and love and happiness that we've all been seeking is always already present. It's always here right now, before, during, and after any seeking you do. And that's wonderful news because you can just rest, you can just stop, you can just be in this Truth. And it's, at the same time, really bad news if you're a spiritual seeker because when you find out that what you've been seeking is already present, you're out of a job.

The job description for the ego now is to do nothing, and that's not such good news for the ego. The ego likes the job of spiritual seeker. It gives it something to do. It adds a lot of beauty and drama and intensity to life, to be seeking for the truth. Then to find out that it's already here—that it's present in every moment—can be a shock. But it's also really wonderful news because then you finally get to rest; you finally get to just be in the Truth that you are, which is this Love.

Actually it's more accurate to say that the source of peace, the source of love, the source of happiness is always present because it sometimes appears with the quality of peace, and in another moment, it appears with the quality of love. Strangely enough, the source that is the source of peace, love, wisdom, and happiness is actually the source of everything. That makes the spiritual seeker's job even smaller because you don't even have to weed out the peace from everything else that's present. It's all coming from the same source, so there's no need to get rid of anything for the source of peace to be recognized.

(A): Would you say that your message is only for spiritual seekers then?

(N): No, actually the message is for everyone, and in fact it's a great blessing if you're lucky enough to skip the stage of being a spiritual seeker. You don't have to go through quite as much identification with that kind of struggle. If you're lucky enough to hear this Truth before you've gone looking for it, it can save you a lot of trouble.

(A): And isn't this Truth really just Being, just Beingness? Isn't it like, sort of a joke?

(N): Yes, it is a wonderful joke because this Beingness is always present, even before you knew to look for it. The joke is that Beingness is very ordinary; the joke is that it's the most natural thing about all of us, about every experience. The source of all has no qualities, and yet all of these qualities of peace and quiet and stillness and loving embrace all come out of it. But the joke is that it is also present in very ordinary moments. It is also that which listens to the news every night on TV. It is also that which brushes your teeth every morning. It is also that which sometimes gets irritated at your neighbor. It is also that which takes the dog out for a walk. It is present in all of



those different experiences, all of the different emotions, all of the different thoughts. They are all occurring in and coming from this Presence, this empty kind of Presence that is the source of everything.

(A): Do you see, as other teachers do, that this is quite an extraordinary time, in that very ordinary people are waking up?

(N): Yes there seems to be a greater possibility today of recognizing this Truth. Recognizing this very ordinary and yet also extraordinary Presence is easier now, and I have no idea why that is; it's just an observation. It is happening to people who've been long-time spiritual seekers, and it's happening to people who don't have a spiritual bone in their body.

(A): Have you always been a spiritual seeker?

(N): I went through a period, in my teens, when I was deeply involved with spiritual seeking; and then it seemed like I needed to go out and live in the world and find out what that was all about. I couldn't take a short cut. I first had to try to make it in the real world of careers and marriage and owning a house. It was only when I had been successful in a material sense and had that success fall apart that I found myself looking for a deeper truth again—something that was more satisfying. I found that there wasn't real happiness in the surface of things and that I had to go to the source for that.

(A): And was there a path that took you there? Obviously there was.

(N): You know, the great thing about my teacher is that she wouldn't teach me anything: She wouldn't give me a path. She wouldn't give me anything to do. Anytime I tried to turn her words into a way of understanding, a way of grasping onto this Truth and containing it in an understanding, she would pull the rug out from underneath me. And yet, there was something about her that was undeniable. There was a Presence, an atmosphere around her that was irresistible. I dropped everything in my life to be in her presence. But there was also nothing there for me: There was no understanding, no great teaching or path to follow, no great explanation of everything. Instead, it was up to me to let go of all of that and find that Presence in myself. And there is no "how." The closest thing to how is to do nothing, be quiet, rest. The mind doesn't like that because it doesn't get any credit that way.

(A): And when you say "rest," obviously you're not talking about sitting down on the sofa and not moving for a period of time. Do you mean resting the mind?

(N): I mean resting from the struggle to find the Truth, resting from doing anything to improve yourself or your experiences or your emotional state. Obviously, you still get up in the morning and eat breakfast and go about your day. It's a surrendering of all of the effort to make this Love and Peace that is already present be present. When you drop the effort, then the underlying Truth that it is already here becomes obvious.

(A): Do you mean dropping the effort, whether it be in creating happiness or in being happy or sad or whatever the emotions or whatever's going on?

(N): It is so wonderfully simple: It's already here. There's nothing for you to do. When you realize this, then there is the possibility of just looking in your present moment experience and finding what's already present here and now. I would also add that this Truth, this place of peace and quiet, can often seem very quiet and small. So at first, you may only have a very small recognition in your Heart that there is Love already present, there is peace, there is acceptance of the way things are. This recognition may be very small and therefore seem insignificant. But if you give that little sliver of peace that's present right now your full attention, you may find that—even though it is very quiet, very simple, and very ordinary—this Peace is actually very big, very vast and that it is much bigger than your so-called problems or your sadness or fear or anger. It turns out that this quiet, simple Truth is much bigger than what you first think. The invitation is to give this peaceful, aware Presence all of your attention, to trust the one thing you can trust, which is your own Heart, your own recognition of Truth.

(A): Well, I know that some of the listeners must have the same questions I have, and I'm sitting here thinking, yes, but how are we going to get world peace and how are we going to make goodness happen in the world, because it almost sounds to me like not doing, nondoing.

(N): In the teaching I do, which is called satsang, I'm often pointing to the half of the truth that people are overlooking. This quiet, peaceful place of Beingness is the place we lose track of when we're so involved in doing in the world and making the world a better place and making our lives better. So the pointing is to this overlooked half of the truth. But that still is only half of the story.

Once there's been a recognition of this deeper, more all-inclusive Truth, it would be a big mistake to hide from the world in this peaceful Beingness. One of the potential pitfalls is a tendency to hide out there, to think, "Now I've got peace, so I can't be bothered with the rest of the world." If you do try to hide, what you've done is formed a new ego, a new spiritual ego as someone who has become enlightened or awakened. You've just shifted your identity to an equally limited part of yourself.

Beyond that, is the opportunity to bring this realization into action in the world and to find out what this peaceful, loving Presence is capable of. For this, the most important question is: "Where is this action coming from?" If you're trying to save the world out of a place of personal interest and identity, it may look like you're doing good work; but if you scratch beneath the surface, what it's really about is making you look better and satisfying your personal desires and needs.

However, something profound can happen when you embrace the whole truth. Not only are you willing to recognize the perfection that is always present, even before the world has been fixed, you are also willing to look your own life, your own actions, and the world straight in the eye and see what is in alignment with this bigger view, and what needs to be changed to be in alignment. Then the changes can come from a place of loving acceptance instead of a place of painful resistance. When change comes from a place of loving acceptance, it is more often based on a clear and true seeing of what is needed. When change comes from a place of painful resistance, it is often based on personal needs or desires, and it isn't as wise.

In the whole truth, what is missing is the sense that it's all about me. That is the other reason why it isn't good news for the ego to find out that peace, love, and happiness are already here. Because along with the job of seeker, what also goes is the sense of the Truth having anything to do with you. There's nothing personal about this Truth; it is very impersonal. And yet, when you are aligned with the Truth, you are completely at ease in the world and do whatever needs to be done.

I read a quote recently where another teacher said he doesn't understand what all the big fuss is about enlightenment because, to him, the only value of enlightenment is if it allows there to be more love in the world. Enlightenment for enlightenment's sake is just a way to get your own needs met. So unless that realization is put in service to the Truth, and this peaceful, loving Presence is put into expression in the world, then what's the point—what's the difference whether someone is enlightened or not?

(A): Well, I guess I would ask you that question, what is the point?

(N): The ultimate truth is always one step ahead... so it's always a mystery. When we see very loving actions coming out of someone who has had a profound spiritual experience, we often think that all we have to do is act like them, and then we'll have profound spiritual experiences too. So we act like Mother Theresa or we act like an Indian saint. But where are these actions coming from, what are they in service to? If they are in service to an idea of yourself as a spiritual and, therefore, special person, then those actions will get distorted by your needs. But if they are coming from Love, which isn't personal, which isn't yours in any sense, then they have a freshness and unpredictable spontaneity to them. One of the qualities of this Presence is that it is very fresh, very unexpected. My teacher was a master at totally surprising me. Whatever I thought she would do, she would do something so completely different and unexpected that I would be left breathless in astonishment.

(A): Who is your teacher?

(N): My teacher's name is Neelam. She spent time in India with Papaji, who was her teacher.

(A): What does your name mean, and where does it come from?

(N): I got my name from Neelam. It's a Sanskrit word that means "pure." A friend of mine gave me a bar of soap from India. Just like Ivory soap says "pure" on the box, this soap said "nirmala."

(A): What part of your work brings you the most satisfaction?

(N): What is amazing to me is how much satisfaction I find in everything nowadays. There is a great sense of joy when someone is getting this simple message, and there is a great sense of joy and wonder when someone is struggling. And there is a great sense of joy when I'm resting in what is, and there is also a great sense of joy and wonder when I get caught again in suffering, by trying to make my life better or do it better.

(A): Would you say something about how one might directly experience something one has fought all one's life?

(N): Do you mean a part of your life that's not fulfilling or giving you trouble?

(A): Yes, in the sense of something that you push away.

(N): The simplest thing is to start with whatever is, whatever is present. If it's really true that the source of everything you've been seeking is already here, then the obvious thing is to start with whatever is here. So if what is, is that you are resisting or pushing away something, then you get curious about that. Find out what the experience of resistance is. Who or what is resisting? What is that really like?

One quality of this Truth, this mystery that we are, is awareness—it has consciousness. It's hearing this voice right now and feeling the sensations of the body in this moment. So awareness is present, right now. This is a good quality to start with to understand this mystery because it is always present. Even if you're in great suffering, in great struggle and resisting life with all your might, there's also awareness of the resistance. This may not seem like that big a deal, but the invitation is to notice what is aware of the resistance? What is this very ordinary quality of experience we call awareness that is always present?

Without doing anything to the resistance or to the problem causing it, just notice that there's also awareness present, and get curious about that. Then, some wonderful questions can be asked: What is Awareness's perspective on this problem? And what is Awareness's perspective on your resistance to it? The funny thing is, Awareness doesn't have a problem with anything, not even with your resisting your problems. So when you ask that question, when you look out from a place of just Awareness, you can't find problems anymore. All of the same elements are still present in your life, but Awareness itself has no problem with any of them.

(A): In being enlightened, does it mean that you always recognize this Awareness or that you've had some big wake-up call?

(N): Like everything else in life, no two people experience any aspect of life the same way. The same thing is true of this experience that the word enlightenment points to: There is no formula for it. There are people for whom it's a big, explosive experience that completely obliterates any suffering or struggle or resistance. And there are others who very gradually, almost imperceptibly, have moved into a place where they are recognizing and living out of more and more of the Truth. I have friends who don't consider themselves enlightened because they never had a big experience, while it's obvious to everyone around them that they are living out of an enlightened perspective. Because of all these different experiences, any formula you put on this very mysterious thing we call enlightenment or awakening is going to unnecessarily limit it.

(A): Do you still struggle?

(N): I was telling a friend over lunch today that the difference is that I can't keep up the struggling for very long. Now when I start to

struggle with what is happening or go to battle with reality, the experience is similar to putting on a pair of underwear that's about five sizes too small. In the past, I would pull that underwear on anyway because it was my underwear, dammit, and I was determined to wear it until I wore it out. Now it's more like I get the underwear half way up and say, "Nah, it's not worth it." So I can't say that there is never a movement to resist, but when resistance occurs, it's very difficult to sustain it because there's such a recognition of the contrast between the suffering and this place of peace. The contrast is so obvious that there's less tendency to keep going, to fight and struggle all the way into the too-tight underwear of a so-called problem.

(A): Do you feel that you are a channel for some energy or entity?

(N): I don't feel that I am anything. So all there really is, is this energy, this Presence. Another way of saying the same thing is that everything is a channel for this energy; everything is an expression of this Presence. The Presence itself has no preferences. There is no better expression of this Presence. It is all perfect; it is all beautiful just the way it is.

(A): And would you say your realization is still deepening?

(N): Endlessly, endlessly. I feel like I've barely scratched the surface.

(A): And if there's one thing you would say to our listeners today to assist them in seeking Truth, what would that be?

(N): Simply check beneath your shoulders. It's not that the truth is located anywhere physically in your body, but somehow in including the knowing that comes from beneath your shoulders, you automatically include more of your Being than just your mind. It's not that the mind is wrong or a mistake, but when you include more of your Being, there is more of a recognition of the whole truth. Especially include your Heart when you look for the truth of your experience. When you include the Heart in finding out what is true, you include this impersonal, yet wise and clear Presence that is always here. What is it that your Heart knows in this moment already? What is it that is already present in your Heart?